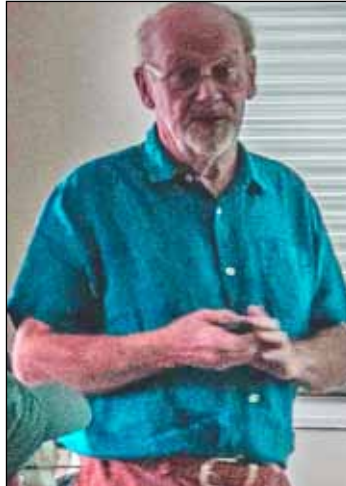




As a society we've been monitoring the health of the Foss for some seven or eight years, starting with just phosphate and nitrate levels using a colourimetric method supplied by FreshWater Watch. This gradually expanded to other parameters including biological surveying of the macro-invertebrates which live on and in the riverbed, monitoring dissolved oxygen levels, which most river dwellers rely on to breathe.

The State of the Foss



Mike hosted the evening

This meeting, at Wiggin-ton Recreation Hall on 15 July, was a way to tell everyone what is being done to help understand the state of the river's health, to start the debate on what it is we want to monitor in future, and how we can use all this information to influence those public bodies which are responsible for the river.

Our aims are:

- To look after the River Foss and its environs for the benefit of all;
- Work towards a healthy, clean, biodiverse river and bankside environment;
- Generate high quality data, enabling us to understand the state of the river and to challenge regulator bodies when appropriate.

To do this we will continue to engage with, amongst others:

- The Environment Agency and various local councils
- Yorkshire Water
- Environmental Groups (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, St Nicks)
- The universities of York and Leeds

The society has been a core team member of three York University projects, with research and work as follows:

- Ecomix led by Professor Alistair Boxall
- Assessing and managing the impacts of mixtures of chemicals on UK freshwater biodiversity. It found 30+ chemicals, mainly pharmaceuticals, present in

the Foss. A full report is being written and will be published shortly.

- AQuA led by Dr John Wilkinson
- Improving the quality of citizen science and involving more people. Preliminary work showed the Foss to be one of the most polluted rivers in Yorkshire. This project is only just (slowly) getting going and will hopefully (!) involve a good many RFS volunteers.
- Environmental Sustainability led by Professor Steve Levett
- Briefing multidisciplinary teams of students on projects that have been co-produced with local environmental groups. For example, a project on litter along the Foss should result in CYC installing signage to encourage riparian users to make use of the litter bins. There is no silver bullet.
- There are multiple sources of pollution
- Occasional incidents are difficult to pin down
- Seasonal variations are increasing
- Rainfall becoming ever more variable
- Limited resources
- We have no focal point such as bathing or angling

What next?

- Clarify our objectives and make sure that our results will be accepted by Yorkshire Water and the Environment Agency
- How to best make use of our results?
- AQuA will bring many benefits
- Opportunities for members to participate in monitoring in 2026/7
- Novel analytical methods
- Training and quality control of methods
- Form closer cooperation with other environmental groups in North Yorkshire.

The meeting provoked a lot of discussion and will be followed up by a document assessing and detailing the work to date as a basis for deciding the future direction and aims of the society's efforts.

Thanks to all those members who have volunteered for the various monitoring tasks as without you, none of this could have happened.

We will be needing many more volunteers over time so if you'd like to join us, please get in touch and tell us what you'd like to be involved in. (events@riverfossociety.co.uk)

Mike Gray



Approaching Autumn

OCTOBER

Sat 11th Oct 9.00 am - 12.00 noon Footbridge opposite Morrisons. Riverside litterpick in conjunction with Foxy operating on the river. Please let Tim Rane know if you are joining.

Wed 15th Oct 7.00 pm Strensall Village Hall. Annual Open meeting. Simon Rogerson talking about the history of flooding in York.

Wed 22nd Oct 7.00 pm Social meeting. Return to the Black Swan, Peasholme Green, York. Christine Gray.

DECEMBER

Sun 7th Dec 11.30 am Novotel, Fishergate. Christmas Lunch preceded by a talk on 'Fossils of Yorkshire'. Speaker Liam Herringshaw. Contact: Mike Gray.

CONTACTS

Christine Gray 01904 621808
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Mike Gray 07596 366342 events@riverfossociety.co.uk (preferred)

Tim Rane 07393 305525 timothy.rane@gmail.com

Be sure to check the What's Happening tab on the website for the Activities Diary. This always has the latest news of what's been going on.

Dr Simon Rogerson, from York's Hidden History, guided a group of Society members on the Water Walk looking at how water has shaped York's landscape, from glacial ice sheets to the rivers and lakes that formed the early local landscape, to the history of the Rivers Ouse and Foss. The walk began at St Mary's Abbey where Simon explained the importance of the Ouse for bringing in stone, metals and wool to the city, the former to build the Abbey and the latter to make York's monks very rich. We followed the Ouse past the Minster's water tower on Marygate, the workings of which are still not understood, to the memorial to John Snow, a York boy born in North Street in 1813. Dr John Snow was a pioneer of modern epidemiology, tracing a cholera outbreak in London and identifying the cause as waterborne, not due to 'bad air', and anaesthesia with the use of chloroform including for the births of two of Queen Victoria's children.

With low river levels, we were able to walk down to the Viking Recorder, which has monitored York's many and various floods, then up to King's Staith to hear about the different bridges built over the Ouse and their many ups and downs. Passing an overgrown record of York's floods, we were then shown the Tudor toilet which discharged directly into the Foss from the guardroom of the Fishergate

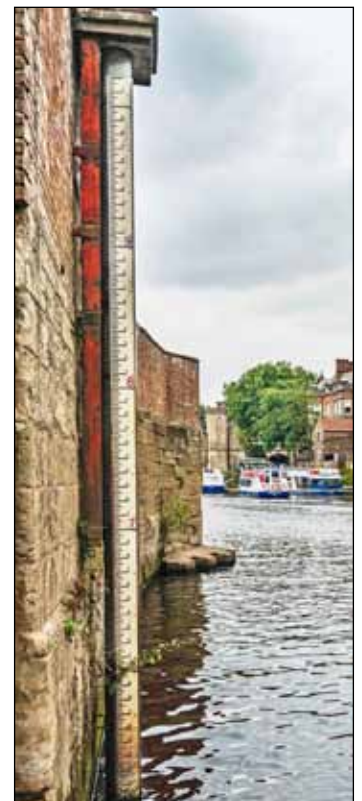
York's Hidden History Water Walk



At the memorial to York born John Snow, who proved that cholera was waterborne, not caused by 'bad air'



A Tudor toilet in Fishergate Postern discharged into the Foss



The Viking Recorder, which has monitored the various floods in York

Postern Tower. We walked past St Denys' church, still under maintenance and significant reduction

in size due to subsidence (ongoing) following the draining of the King's Fishpool on the Foss. Interestingly, St Denys, a Frenchman, is actually the patron saint of, amongst other things, those suffering from hydrophobia.

Finally we were taken to the best view of Rowntree's Wharf and finished at the Merchant Adventurers' Hall, built on the bank of the Foss by those men who helped to make York a vibrant and successful mediaeval city, like the monks we started with.

Barbara Hilton

On 19 June, a group of six walkers (seven if you count one dog) met outside the pub in Sheriff Hutton for an evening walk in great weather. One variant of the Foss Walk passes through the village and we began by following this very briefly before branching off near the Church to cross the Sheriff Hutton to Bulmer road.

Superb Summer Walking

From here we saw both haymaking in the fields and crossed gallops owned by the well-known Easterby family. From here we rose gently along a field edge to enter the southern end of Stittenham Wood.

Field paths took us back to cross the road again near a farm, through a short overgrown area, before turning back towards Sheriff Hutton. The ruined castle in Sheriff Hutton is visible from all directions but the views were also extensive towards the Yorkshire Wolds and Moors as well.

More crops faced us on our return journey, but luckily paths had been provided at most, if not all, points where the crops were high. The final section took us through the churchyard back into the village after a delightful walk.

A group of six walkers and two dogs met on 2 August at Blue Bridge, the confluence of the Ouse and the Foss, in central York, for a walk taking in sections of both rivers. We began by walking north along the Ouse meeting more and more people as we neared the centre of York.

Passing under Skeldergate Bridge, we then walked along King's Staith before crossing Ouse Bridge. A short detour via North Street was forced on us by a path closure but we were able to get into North Street Gardens



An evening walk on 19 June in wonderful weather



On 2 August we explored bits of both the Ouse and the Foss

to view the John Snow memorial before ascending the steps to Lendal Bridge.

Once across the bridge we descended steps onto Dame Judi Dench Walk and found perhaps the busiest part of our walk, as an art market occupied the riverside path, and was very popular. At Scarborough Bridge we took a path along the side of the Marygate car park and then walked up St Mary's, admiring the tall Georgian terraces.

Crossing Bootham, we then walked through the now abandoned grounds of Bootham Park Hospital before walking briefly past the Hospital up Wigginton Road. Soon we joined the cycle track, built

on the old Rowntrees railway line, which allowed us to approach Haxby Road: the Foss was getting nearer. A refreshment break at 'Cavo' allowed us to view the conversion of the former Rowntrees factory space into the appropriately named 'Cocoa works'.

We then returned to the old railway line which took us to meet the Foss opposite Huntington Road, passing through the Foss Fairy trail, a charming community initiative. From here we braved the traffic around Foss Islands Road before cutting through Rowntree Wharf to enter Fossgate. A short distance then took us to the end of a delightful walk, and for some lunch at 'Spark'.

Derek Chivers

Portakabin Safety Stand Down Day

On 7th July Portakabin hosted a safety stand down day when they halted production to demonstrate, discuss and encourage health and safety issues. They invited local businesses, charities, and community groups which would fit in with the health and safety ethic they are trying to promote. The River Foss Society fit into the category of health, as nature plays a big part in mental and physical health.

The day was an opportunity for their teams to find information on what is available in the local area to support health and well-being. It was also a networking opportunity for their teams, and for us too. It was an interesting event and the RFS team of Helen and Roger



Meeting some of the Portakabin staff



River Foss Society had an informative stall

Button, Lynette and Peter Mills, Paul Wilson and Barbara Hilton and I enjoyed the chance to talk to an audience we'd not usually encounter.

We'd like to welcome the Portakabin employees who joined us on the day and shortly afterwards to the society. To cap the event, we were surprised and very grateful to Portakabin who not only shared the profits from an employees' raffle among the stall holders, but

made our share up to £600. A

significant sum of money which we will put to good use! Thank you, Portakabin.

Mike Gray

We did the litter pick on 16th August with 11 volunteers. We struggled to find anything large because of the duckweed blocking our view. We hit a motor bike in Foxy, the Council boat, and tried to recover it, but it was too heavy for us to lift. We put a rope on it for a later ground recovery. We also saw a bike and a trolley, but when Foxy moved in closer the area was then covered in duckweed and we couldn't find the rubbish with the hooks. This will have to be done at another time.

It was very different for us to collect litter this time because pruning has not taken place, and the low river levels meant we were grounding a lot. Visibility was very poor and Foxy struggled with the large amount of reeds.

We were blocked from access by Foxy at Huntington Road due to the presence of four willows which had



Foxy was surrounded by duckweed

Dealing with Litter

fallen into the river. The Council were aware of this, and returned on 21 August with a large team and a winch to pull these trees out. This meant that the Fairy Trail was temporarily closed. However, it was a successful day and we now have better access.

The trapped duckweed is rotting and causing a stench; residents are complaining about this to the Council, as are fishermen in the Huntington Road area.

Regarding the badly leaking lock gates, the replacement gates are now made but fitting will be delayed until the second quarter of 2026 due to crane access problems.

Tim Rane



Part of the team on Foxy

Faugh A Ballagh! (Clear the Way)

The Foss Walk has received some deserved attention recently to clear overgrown vegetation in the narrower areas away from the river itself. With the agreement of N Yorks County Council and as the summer flush of growth ends, a programme has started to improve access in areas around Sheriff Hutton.



You will have received details via eVents calling for volunteers to help out; it ain't hard work!

Please contact Bill Twist at btwist23@gmail.com to register your interest. These pictures show the footpath West of the village – “Before” and “After”.



Bill Twist

Volunteers Needed!

Volunteer opportunities arise from time to time, but it's not always easy to organise things so that work and workers end up in the same place at the same time. To help this happen, the Society needs a Volunteer Co-ordinator.

Could this be you? If you are interested, please get in touch via info@riverfossociety.co.uk.

Stoneflies, living up to their name, are generally found in fast-flowing, stony streams and rivers as they need high oxygen concentrations to survive and are particularly sensitive to organic pollution which is why they are so important in water quality assessment.

We have 34 stonefly species in Britain all but two producing one brood per year. They go through 10 to 20 moults before the nymphs crawl out of the water, find a sheltered place where they grip tightly to stones or wood and the adult stoneflies then emerge from the split nymphal skin. Nymphs' bodies are flattened cylinders with stout legs held out to the side and ending in a pair of claws to enable them to cling closely to the substrate where water velocity is reduced. If velocities become too high, they burrow into crevices in the sediment with some having been found 50cm down. Nymphs are mainly nocturnal in their habits and are herbivorous or detritivorous in early life, eating algae and decaying leaves but in some families the older nymphs become omnivorous, supplementing their vegetarian diet by preying on any small invertebrates they can catch such as small worms, midge larvae, mayfly and other stonefly nymphs. They are not too particular.



Isoperla sp

The peak adult flight season is between April and July but they can be found all year. The nondescript adults, which live only a few days, find each other prior to mating by 'drumming' their abdomens against a substrate to produce species-specific pulses and pauses so they must have a method of filtering out considerable background noise from the nearby stream as they are

very poor fliers and tend to stay close to water. The females mature their eggs over a few days before producing an egg mass which is released into the stream where the eggs sink and anchor to the riverbed.

Clean Living Stoneflies

We have only found one or two stonefly nymphs in two of the headwater sites on a few occasions although, if the river was as clean as it ought to be, there would be more. Surprisingly, in March we found one nymph in a tributary where the water quality had im-

proved considerably since it was first sampled in 2023 and also, again surprisingly, one was found this July in Sessions Reserve. Hopefully, where there is one, there should be more.



Nemoura avicularis

As mentioned, stoneflies need clean aquatic habitats to complete their lifecycle but marginal vegetation is also essential for the adults to shelter in and to breed successfully. Loss of suitable habitat is the most immediate threat to stonefly populations including nutrient enrichment from sewage discharges and various agricultural practices, the removal of marginal vegetation by weed control and bankside grazing and river maintenance, includ-

ing dredging, leading to bed disturbance and increased silt loads. All of these occur on the Foss although there are now signs that changes to some of the practices are being made so improvements in water quality should be seen. In time, we might find more stonefly nymphs at more sites which would, of course, also be excellent news for all the other wildlife.

Barbara Hilton

Summer Balsam Bashing

We had hoped that this year's Himalayan Balsam campaign would benefit from coordination and

participation from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, St Nicks and others in order to tackle areas further upstream and thus try and minimise seed spread down the river.

However, due to a number of factors these hopes did not come to fruition and we were left to prepare our own RFS strategy to target our 'traditional' areas, and to try and liaise with St Nicks to coordinate a more localised campaign.



A sizeable challenge!

Our work started in May with the creation of two 1m 'test' squares in different terrain where all the young balsam plants – approx 3" or 75mm in height - were hand pulled. The plan was to monitor these areas during the summer to see what growth would develop.

Balsam Bashing in earnest began on 9th June and over the next eight weeks numerous volunteers kindly gave up their free time to pull, slash, bash and perspire! It must be mentioned that these sessions were all taking place during some of the hottest weather of the year, so even greater respect to all those involved! It is also worth noting that only one session (out of over 17) had to be cancelled due to rain - unusual for a British summer!!

The areas worked on this year were:

Strensall – Path side areas down to and including the 'settling beds' as well as wooded areas away from the riverside path. It was noted that the two test squares had had



Sunhats were needed

On the Foss

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minimal re-growth over the June and July period, so this is an option to watch and investigate

further. The obvious issue is the hand pulling of very small plants; doing this on a large scale or in awkward areas is not going to be practical, but it could be used for specific areas, especially if other options are available i.e. hoeing etc. An idea to develop possibly.

Haxby Weir – Close to 100% clearance (if such an achievement can be claimed with HB) around the weir and the path through the wooded area between river and the playing fields. This year there was much less growth on the path side down-river of the weir, but there were large areas of growth only accessible from the river. We are very grateful to St Nicks who had employed two part time staff purely to tackle balsam; these guys cleared the river and the steep sides of the small stream all the way back into the woods.

Huntington – Ring Road bridge downstream past All Saints church to the metal footpath gate – a significant amount cleared. Again this year there was much less growth on the path side and much more growing in less accessible areas



Enthusiastic growth

which could only be attacked by being in waders and in the river. Thanks to Andy Holt and Andy Mulholland for donning thick rubber waders in 25° plus heat - this is certainly an uncomfortable way to spend a couple of hours - but does help shed a pound or two!

Fairy Trail – Andy Holt liaised with Tracy and helped to run a couple of sessions here.

In addition to all this work there have been others who have been out clearing their own local patch in order to try and curb the spread of this pernicious weed.

I would like to thank all of the volunteers for giving up their free time and working in very hot, trying conditions – and spending in excess of 120 hours tackling this ongoing problem.

Hopefully everyone found some enjoyment and were able to appreciate the different flora and fauna (beyond the HB) encountered whilst being out in nature.

If you did enjoy it, and would like to repeat the experience next year, I'm pretty sure that the HB will be back!

Paul Wilson